

Interview with Henry S. Villard

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR HENRY S. VILLARD

Interviewed by: Dimitri Villard

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Q: Mr. Villard, could you give us a bit of your family background and educational history?

VILLARD: I was born in New York City on March 30, 1900 and went to school in the Browning School in that city for nine years before going to Harvard. I spent four years at Harvard, got an AB degree cum laude and did post-graduate work at Magdalen College, Oxford University, England.

Q: What brought your interest to the field of foreign affairs?

VILLARD: As a boy I accompanied my family on various trips to Europe and was deeply interested from the start about anything foreign. In World War I, I drove an ambulance in Italy for the American Red Cross attached to the Italian army. I always avoided the idea of going into the Foreign Service because of the notion that the diplomatic life was the life of a dilettante.

Q: So, why did you decide to enter the Foreign Service?

VILLARD: I tried various things first. I was interested in journalism and in teaching and spent some years at both. Finally, after passage of the Rogers Act, a friend of mine in

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the Foreign Service urged me to take the exams for a career based on merit, not political influence—which I did and when I passed the examinations and found that I was admitted to being a Foreign Service officer (unclassified) I accepted the appointment and reported to Washington. I soon found that the life was not that of a dilettante at all, far from it.

Q: Your first post was in Tehran in 1929 in what was then called Persia, now known as Iran. What was the situation in Persia in those days?

VILLARD: It was a very interesting situation indeed. The ruler was Reza Shah Pahlavi, a Cossack officer who had overthrown the Kajar dynasty and assumed control of the government in 1924. He became minister of war and finally crowned himself Shah. His object was to get Persia into a modern frame of mind instead of the medieval status it had been in. He literally dragged Persia into the twentieth century, opposed from all sides by the mullahs, the clergy, who at that time were very powerful and are today even more powerful.

I was appointed vice consul in charge of the consulate general in Tehran and arrived at my post in September 1929. One of my predecessors, Robert Imbrie, had been assassinated in the streets of Tehran and people were still talking about the Imbrie case. It was not a very encouraging start to living in Persia.

Q: What were your responsibilities?

VILLARD: As officer in charge of the consulate, which was entirely separate from the legation, my responsibilities dealt largely with visas for the United States, passports, protection of American citizens, notarial services, promotion of trade, invoices for Persian exports to the U.S., and so forth.

Q: What were the major United States concerns in Persia at that time?

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VILLARD: The main concern as far as the United States went was the construction of Persia's first railroad that the Shah had undertaken. His idea was to link up the north and the south of his country in a direct rail line. A German consortium was given the northern section, from Tehran north to the Caspian Sea and an American outfit, Ulen and Company was given the southern section, from Tehran to the Persian Gulf. These two groups worked together until, because of various unfortunate incidents, the Americans were thrown out and the Germans finished the job. But as long as I was in Persia the building of the line on the American sector was our most immediate concern.

Q: Charles C. Hart was the ambassador at that time. What was your impression of him at that moment?

VILLARD: Charlie Hart was a shirt-sleeved diplomat, a former newspaper man from Oregon. He was a political appointee, of course, but he was also one of the most capable persons I have ever met in the line of diplomacy. He had no foreign service training whatever. He had been minister to Albania before he came to Tehran, but he had no other experience in diplomacy. He was a straight-shooting, sincere, blunt speaking man; he brooked no antagonism towards the United States and stood up for the United States and its values at every turn. He had a great sense of humor. He was so humorous in some of his dispatches, in fact, that they were sometimes given to the Secretary of State to read as a relief from the ordinary dispatches that came in from the field. He was a man who could not be fooled, he could see through anything. He was hard boiled, but also compassionate. I would rate him very high, especially as a political appointee.

Q: Did we have an embassy or legation in Persia?

VILLARD: A legation. There were very few embassies in those days, most posts were legations.

Q: What was your impression of the legation itself?

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VILLARD: The legation was well run. It was a small legation in a primitive country. It was an unhealthy post. Of course there were no women assigned to the legation, the clerks were either Persian, Assyrian or Armenian. They were all very loyal to the United States.

Q: How did you view the role of the United States in the Middle East in 1929?

VILLARD: When I was assigned to Tehran most of my friends pitied me. They said, "What a shame that you are going to a part of the world where nothing ever happens." To a certain extent that was true, American interests were not so very important in that part of the world at that particular time. We were observers and reporters rather than participants in the scene.

Q: The time you were stationed there was the beginning of the great depression in the United States. Can you tell us what were your impressions of the effect of that on the Foreign Service?

VILLARD: Well, at the beginning the effects in the legation and consulate in Tehran were not yet noticeable. Later, in Washington, I was furloughed for one month on a payless furlough, and economy was the watchword. I was not stationed abroad during a large part of the depression.

Q: In 1931 you returned to Washington for an assignment to the Department of State. What were your duties at that time?

VILLARD: I was assigned to the Persian desk of the Department for a period of four years. My other countries were Afghanistan, Turkey and Iraq. At my level, the lowest level, I handled the relations with those countries.

Q: During that time there was a change of administration with Hoover out and Franklin Roosevelt elected to the presidency. What was your impression as a young Foreign Service officer to this event?

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VILLARD: It did not affect me personally because as a career Foreign Service officer my allegiance was to the United States regardless of the name of the incumbent or the political party in power at that time. I served my government impartially. Therefore the change of administration had no effect on me personally.

Q: Do you feel that Roosevelt had a different view of the role of the United States in the world than his predecessor?

VILLARD: Roosevelt was very much his own master as far as relations with the rest of the world were concerned. He had very little use for the State Department or the Foreign Service, but a more global aspect on foreign affairs than his predecessor.

Q: How was the State Department run in the 1931-35 period?

VILLARD: By and large the Department was run by the geographic divisions, by the assistant secretaries, by the under secretary and of course by the secretary of state himself. Cordell Hull was the object of great affection by his staff. He was easy of access and it was very much a family affair to discuss problems. One could hardly imagine today a small group running the Department as in those days. But Roosevelt regularly by-passed Hull in favor of Sumner Welles, the Under Secretary. Hull was particularly concerned with reciprocal trade agreements and with the advancement of commerce.

Q: The State Department was then located in the old executive office building next to the White House.

VILLARD: That is right, a gingerbread-type structure with high ceilings in every room, mantelpieces, huge windows, marble decorations, swinging doors in each room like an old saloon.

Q: How would you rate the competence of the Department's staff at that time?

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VILLARD: In general I would rate the staff very good, especially the heads of the geographical divisions.

Q: What were the major concerns of your job?

VILLARD: My major concern was always Persia and Persia's concerns with the United States. At the particular time I was desk officer we had the problem of the Ulen case, Ulen was the company that was thrown out by the Persians on the alleged ground of breaking their contract for the construction of the railway. There were many angles to this and the case dragged on for years. The Persians sued the company and the company sued the Persians and it was deadlocked the entire time of my sojourn at the Persian desk.

We also had another kind of problem with Persia. For example, the day that the housekeeper of the Persian legation came into my room unannounced with a baby in her arms which she deposited on my desk. She said, "What are you going to do about this?" and explained that the infant was the child she had borne for the charg# d'affaires of the Persian legation who had since returned to Tehran. It was one of the problems to collect from the Persian government money to support the charge's child in the United States.

Another example of the problems I had - there was a famous air race from London to Melbourne in Australia. One of the entrants was an American who was forced down over the southern coast of Persia. Whereupon he was promptly arrested and put in jail by the Persian authorities. My problem was to get him out of jail in time so that he could continue in the race, but it was a hopeless game.

Q: Did you have any problems in Afghanistan in that particular period?

VILLARD: There were no particular problems in Afghanistan. It was an extremely primitive country. Assassinations were frequent, changes of government were frequent. I remember accompanying the Afghan ambassador to call on Secretary of State Cordell Hull and

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guiding him through the interview that followed. He was totally lost in Washington and appreciated any help in finding his way around diplomatic circles.

Q: What can you tell us of your impressions of the working habits of some of the senior members of the Department at that time?

VILLARD: Well I can immediately think of my chief in the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, Wallace Murray. He was probably the best chief I could possibly have had, but he was a martinet. He was tough, incisive, extremely able, shrewd, astute, never spared his men in any way, extremely hard working, but a person from whom one could learn an enormous amount. I think if we had more of his ability our record in the diplomatic field would have been improved.

Q: That period of time was before the invention of air conditioning and can you tell us what it was like to be in the State Department in the middle of summer?

VILLARD: We pulled down the shade and put an electric fan on the floor so that it would play on your feet, took off your coat, rolled up your sleeves and perspired. That is the way it was and usually when the temperature reached ninety-five degrees the Department was dismissed for the day. We would all go home and try to keep cool.

Q: In 1935 you were assigned to Rio de Janeiro and subsequently to Caracas, Venezuela. What were your positions and what did you do at that time?

VILLARD: The assignment to Rio turned out to be an unfortunate one. I was sent there as consul particularly to make a study of foreign exchange problems which were causing a good bit of difficulty at the time. Unfortunately my chief, the consul general, did not see fit to give me time to make such a study and assigned me instead to issuing passports, visas, performing notarial services, duties which any clerk could have done. It was the way he happened to run his office. I thought I was being assigned to the embassy, but such was not the case. I spent some time as consul, but I did not feel that I was serving any useful

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purpose for the Department or the embassy either. The embassy had put in a request that I be transferred to it, but the Department turned it down. I then decided that I would try to extricate myself from a situation that was not in accord with what I had expected. I felt that after four years of political work in the State Department I was qualified to do more than the jobs that I was doing. So through friends of mine in the Department I obtained a transfer to Caracas. Caracas turned out to be a very different post.

Q: What were the concerns of the United States in that region at that time?

VILLARD: The main concern was what would happen to Venezuela after the death of the dictator, General Gomez, who had ruled the country for twenty years with an iron hand. The Department expected that the streets would run with blood in a revolution after his death and they particularly wanted reports on the political situation. This was an extremely interesting period, but instead of riots and bloodshed, the transition proved to be an easy one, led by General Lopez Contreras, who was an astute general of the army and guided the country through a delicate and difficult period. The main reason for our concern was the presence of American oil companies, in particular Standard Oil of New Jersey, the leader among the group of large companies and smaller independent companies. But the oil interests were our main American concern.

Q: How was the embassy in Venezuela run, Meredith Nicholson was the ambassador?

VILLARD: Meredith Nicholson was another political appointee under whom it was my good fortune to serve. He was a distinguished author who wrote novels such as, *The House of a Thousand Candles*, and *Port of Missing Men* and other popular stories of the time. He had been very successful as an author. He was advanced in his years. When I arrived at the legation, he said to me "You are in charge of the work here. If you want me to sign a despatch you will find me on the porch with a whisky and soda in my hand admiring the beautiful scenery. Otherwise you are in charge." That suited me very well.

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Q: Would you say the Department was obsessed with Latin America during that period?

VILLARD: Well, it is difficult for me to judge at just how the Department looked at Latin America since I was in the field and not in the Department, but my impression was that an enormous amount of attention was being paid to Pan American Airways. It was in the early days of expansion of that airline through Latin America and we were giving it all kinds of support. The Assistant Secretary for Latin America, Francis White, was promoting Latin America assiduously and it is quite possible there was an imbalance there, but not being in Washington at the time I would not know exactly.

Q: You were reassigned to the Department in 1937, what was your assignment when you returned to Washington?

VILLARD: I went back into the Division of Near Eastern Affairs. I was very glad to get there after my experience in Rio. I was on familiar ground; I was assigned to handle relations with Syria, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula (including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait). The beginning of United States oil interests was starting at that time and I felt quite at home. Then all of a sudden, out of the blue, the Department became conscious that Africa was in the realm of Hitler's ambitions. Hitler was thinking of Africa as a reserve granary and mineral source for his eventual world design. It was decided to pay attention to that continent for the first time. For some reason which I will never understand I was tapped as the African specialist. From that time on I devoted all my time to the African continent, which had never been regarded before as separate from the mother countries. The African colonies, for example, were handled in the European Division as an adjunct to the country desks, such as France, Italy, Spain and so forth.

My first job was to read up on Africa. The library had very few books on the subject, but I did what I could in expanding my knowledge at the public library. Then in order to become acquainted at first hand with the continent I was given the opportunity of going to Africa on the shakedown cruise of the U.S.S. Boise, a 10,000 ton cruiser. I was given the special

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job of carrying to the president of Liberia a remnant of the original Liberian flag, sent by a philanthropic organization called the Phelps-Stokes Fund which sponsored missionary activity in Liberia.

This experience was highly instructive. I spent a couple of weeks in Liberia and learned at first hand how that small, independent country was faring. It was not doing very well although President Barclay, the descendent of a freed slave, was an extremely able person, about the best president that Liberia could have had. We proceeded from Liberia, where the main American interest was the Firestone Company's large rubber plantation, to South Africa. We anchored in Cape Town for ten days or so and I had the opportunity of meeting the government officials, both in Cape Town and in Pretoria, and paying a visit to Swaziland.

Back in Washington the main problem soon arose, which occupied all of my time. The fall of France had resulted in the deprivation of economic supplies of all kinds for French territories in North Africa—Morocco, Algeria and Tunis. The Arab population was restive. It was decided to supply them with basic items such as tea, sugar, cotton cloth and other essentials of what an Arab populace needed in order to keep them oriented toward the West. Under this framework we organized what was known as the North African Economic Accord with twelve supervisors to see that the goods reached their destination and not leak out to the German forces operating in Libya and elsewhere in North Africa. The supervisors were known as control officers, with the title of vice consul. There were twelve of them and they were inevitably known as the “Twelve Apostles”. Their main job was something that the Department had never imagined doing so far in its existence; they were in fact intelligence officers or spies who were instructed to send back all the information possible about the North African countries. It was realized, although not spoken about officially, that neutral America would sooner or later get into the war and we were determined to be prepared for that day. These officers, who later became the recipients of Distinguished Service Medals, supplied vital military information prior to our landings. The plan ran into much opposition at home because the territories were under

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the control of the Vichy French and the German Armistice Commission; it was anathema to many Americans that we appeared to be helping the enemy. We could not announce the real purpose of our activities until after the United States was actually in the war. This was a highly successful operation, acquiring pre- invasion information, and was of inestimable help to our forces when they landed in 1942, probably saving many lives.

Q: What were the relations like between the African Division and the European Division at that time? Were you subservient or could you pretty much hold your own?

VILLARD: Under Wallace Murray we more than held our own. He was extremely active in protecting our policy interests in Africa and the Near East while the Europeans, although they did not always go along with us, did not give any real trouble. The main difficulty was in the Office of the Economic Advisor. The Economic Office felt that economic relations all had a political tinge to them and Herbert Feis, the director of that office, was a bitter foe of the North African economic accord. We clashed again and again with arguments as to what type of supplies should be allowed into North Africa to keep the Arabs and French officials on our side, but in the end we won out to a measurable extent.

Q: How would you say the management of the Department was changing in that period as it was growing rather rapidly.

VILLARD: Yes, it was. There were constant reorganizations and officials brought in from the outside to take over new jobs. People without any administrative experience or in the ins and outs of Washington's bureaucracy. I remember one gentleman, a Princeton graduate who was the head of Quaker Oats, who tried to cope with a top job. These reorganizations were coming rather rapidly and were hard on the regular incumbents.

Q: How did the more senior Foreign Service officers cope with that?

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VILLARD: Many of them felt swamped and put upon. But we had to, under the necessities and the pressures of war, expand the Foreign Service, bringing in what was known as lateral entries without the customary examination and promotion from the bottom up.

Q: What were your views of some of the people you were dealing with in African affairs at that time, and the various secretaries of state such as Cordell Hull, Stettinius, Byrnes, and their deputies?

VILLARD: Although everybody liked Hull, he was overridden by the Under Secretary, Sumner Welles. Welles had the ear of Roosevelt in the White House and often bypassed the Secretary of State. The Near Eastern Division very frequently did not know what the White House was doing, for example, not until the war was over did a memorandum come to light showing that Roosevelt had promised the Sultan of Morocco independence after the war. No knowledge of this had ever reached the State Department. As for Stettinius, who happened to be an old school mate of mine, he was known as "Stet" in those days, he was a person of enormous good will but very little knowledge of how the State Department operated. He and his advisors were known as Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs because his hair had turned prematurely white. He was often the butt of jokes, but he was actually a person one could get along with extremely well and he did his best for one year. Then Byrnes spent very little time on the job. He was traveling a great part of the time. People had little contact with him, there was a saying at the time that "the Department fiddles while Byrnes roams." Not until we reach Dean Acheson do we have an example of an absolutely topnotch Secretary of State.

Q: What was the role of the White House in foreign affairs as it dealt with matters in your jurisdiction?

VILLARD: Well, the White House was certainly its own foreign affairs establishment. It did as little business with the State Department as it could.

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Q: Then as now?

VILLARD: Then as now. But I must make an exception. Under Acheson and Truman relations were good. They worked well together.

Q: What did you do once the war was over?

VILLARD: I was assigned to the Policy Planning Staff under George Kennan which had recently been formed. This was an experience which was extremely valuable. It was a small group representing the geographical and economic divisions. We sat around the table with Kennan discussing in as free a way as possible various issues of the day on which policy decisions were required. The theory was that we were at the disposal of the Secretary and were to make recommendations on certain special problems. For example with Franco in Spain there was the question of our post-war dealings with him. We sounded out the various experts in the Department and formed our own opinion as to what our relationship should be, made our recommendation to the Secretary, he would study that and send it back to us with concurrence or non- concurrence. This went on day after day and proved a highly instructive experience.

Q: What is your evaluation of George Kennan?

VILLARD: My evaluation is very high. I think he had the best grasp of anyone of the Soviet problem; his famous article by "Mr. X" was the basis of our containment policy. While Kennan was often accused of being in an ivory tower and too philosophical to be in the mainstream of political events, his perception and intelligence were of the highest order. His understanding of foreign policy and foreign affairs were simply tops.

Q: He did predict the outcome in the Soviet Union as we see it today.

VILLARD: His famous remark that "Communism contains the seeds of its own destruction" was certainly correct.

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Q: Dean Acheson was Secretary of State at that time. How did he use the Policy Planning Staff?

VILLARD: Dean Acheson was a diplomat's diplomat. He ran the Department with conciseness, intelligence, understanding, firmness, a legal mind at its best. I had the greatest admiration for him.

Q: Your next assignment was in 1948 as deputy chief of mission in Oslo, Norway. How did you get that assignment?

VILLARD: Although I had not requested the assignment to Norway, I had requested an assignment away from the Arab world. In 1948 I had been offered the post of ambassador to Baghdad, but I had been deputy director to Loy Henderson in the Near Eastern Division at the time the Palestine problem came to the fore with the recognition of Israel to follow. I had been very much involved with the Arab world and I did not agree with my government as to its policy with respect to the Arab-Israeli controversy. At my request the Department decided to transfer me from the area and send me to Norway. There was an unexpected change, but a very welcome one. The ambassador, Charles Ulrick Bay, was a political appointee, on the basis of his cash contribution to the party in power, with no qualifications whatever for diplomacy. He spent by far the larger part of his time in the United States in Palm Beach or in New York and was known in Oslo as the 'ambassador ad interim'. This suited me very well because I was charg# d'affaires for most of the time I was in Norway.

Q: What was the situation in Norway at that time?

VILLARD: It was a very interesting moment to be in Norway because it was at a time when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was being formed. Norway, we hoped, would join the West in forming the treaty whereas Sweden was trying to form a Scandinavian pact consisting of Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The Swedes exerted extreme pressure on Norway to stay out of the North Atlantic alliance and join them

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in a neutralist type organization. So our job was to convince Norway where its best interests lay. I was very happy to find that the Norwegians came over to us. The strength of the Norwegians was illustrated by the Foreign Minister, Halvard Lange, who went to Washington to sign the NATO treaty. He had gone to the airport and his foot was literally on the plane when a secretary of the Soviet embassy rushed up with a note from the Soviet ambassador. In effect the note said that if you sign this NATO agreement it will be your responsibility as to what might happen in the future—a veiled, outright threat. Lange folded the note and handed it back to the secretary and told him to say to his ambassador that he had just left for Washington.

The Norwegians were certainly stalwart members of the North Atlantic alliance and it was a great pleasure and privilege to work with them. They were more than an anchor to a long line of defense which ended in Turkey. Their sincerity and honesty and general cooperative attitude made it a easy to work with them.

Q: In 1951 you returned to Washington to the Department and to the Policy Staff again?

VILLARD: Yes, back to the Department's Policy Planning Staff. By this time George Kennan had departed and Paul Nitze was the director. Paul was a very different type, much more down to earth than George, extremely intelligent, extremely effective, a hard working, devoted, patriotic person. It was a great pleasure to work with him.

Q: What were the major problems you dealt with?

VILLARD: One of the problems was the problem of the Persian Prime Minister, Mossadegh, who was at that time in the ascendance. There was trouble with the Anglo-Persian oil company which had been taken over by the Persians. We offered advice, but our policy planning staff was not directly involved. There was a change of government in Iran at that time engineered by the CIA.

Q: To what extent did the staff get involved in the Korean war situation?

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VILLARD: The Korean war was the subject of considerable discussion as a debate that had no beginning and no end; it went on all the time. Of course it included the removal of MacArthur. The Policy Planning Staff was not involved in that particular act, but it was alerted as soon as it took place. As I recall, Nitze rushed over to the White House to learn first hand what was taking place. It was something we followed very closely but without direct involvement. Was Korea vital to the security of the United States, was a question that motivated our thinking.

Q: In 1952 you were appointed minister to Libya which had just obtained its independence. How did that come about?

VILLARD: That came about because the question of the disposition of the Italian colonies after the war occupied a great deal of attention in the State Department. For a long time there was no solution about what to do about Libya, in particular, Eritrea and Somaliland also. It was a subject that went into the hopper of the United Nations year after year. The Arabs of course pushed for an independent nation. I had been considerably involved in the question of trusteeship, which was part of the United Nations charter. The Italian colonies, the French colonies, all what they called the “dependent areas” of the world, which were in effect colonies of the great powers, were assumed to be headed for a different status. Trusteeship instead of what we used to call the mandate system, loomed high on the agenda. This was the outgrowth of considerable post-war planning that began at Dumbarton Oaks. I had been handling the Italian colonies and with the final decision to give independence to Libya the question arose, who should be our first envoy to that country? The choice fell rather naturally on me.

Q: What was the situation in the country when you arrived?

VILLARD: This was literally to be present at the birth of a nation. A charter had been drawn up for the Libyan government by Adrian Pelt, a Dutchman, a specialist at the United Nations who had devoted a long time to laying out a scheme for governing this country

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which had never known anything but subservience to its Turkish or Italian occupiers. It was literally a start from scratch. A ruler was found, King Idriss, who was a tribesman from the Senussi sect. He was one of the leaders of the resistance, in fact the leader of the resistance against the Italians and the only visible man whom the different parts of Libya could agree upon. There was Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and the Fezzan, all different areas with different interests. But with King Idriss they were united in the Kingdom of Libya. A prime minister was chosen named Mahmoud Muntasser, who had been trained in Italy—an extremely able businessman—a parliament was set up with a higher and a lower house and all the other adjuncts of a modern state. It was a question of working it out from the ground up.

Q: How did you find your staff at the legation at that time?

VILLARD: On the political side I had a very good staff but suffered the loss of the most valuable officer in the course of the McCarthy attacks. My first secretary was a trained language officer who spoke Arabic fluently, knew the Arab world well—he was removed thanks to McCarthy under suspicion of homosexual activities. The rest of the staff was qualified in every way, except that part of the administrative area was deficient in attitude and cooperation. My counselor had no experience in the field, but that was a result of combining the home and the field service in the so-called Wriston report.

Q: How did you deal with the Libyan government?

VILLARD: It was a matter largely of direct dealing. I dealt mainly with the prime minister with whom I developed a strong bond. He was a person whom one could rely upon to be straight, and dependable, more like a European than an Arab.

Q: How was his English?

VILLARD: His English was very poor, but his French was excellent; we managed mostly in French. The other ministers I dealt with individually as the subject matter came up.

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Q: Would you say that there was any hint of what Libya was to become in those days, a radical nation?

VILLARD: I would say not the faintest hint that anything of the kind would happen. The main thing that the Libyans were interested in was the question of economic aid. The per capita income was about \$100 per year. They desperately needed money to function as a state. I had the privilege of handing them a check for one million dollars at one point as a quid pro quo for the right to establish an air base at Wheelus Air Field, just outside Tripoli. Oil had not yet been discovered.

Q: The negotiation for that air base was your principal concern?

VILLARD: That was indeed our principal concern. It lasted for the entire two and a half years that I was there. It was a job that was of some importance. I would like to quote a letter that I received after the base agreement was signed from President Dwight Eisenhower.

White House, September 25, 1955
Dear Mr. Minister:

In accepting your resignation as minister to the United Kingdom of Libya effective on a date to be established, I want to express my appreciation for the excellent services you have performed during the past two and one half years. Your successful conclusion of a military base agreement with the government of Libya is a major and important accomplishment. I wish you every success in your future assignments.

Sincerely,

Dwight Eisenhower

When Qadhafi came into power in 1969 he tore up that agreement in two minutes.

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Q: This marked the beginning of John Foster Dulles in the Department. How did his arrival affect the Department as it affects the Near East?

VILLARD: Dulles kept under his hat most of his ideas and his policies. He was not a person to rely on his staff or experienced Foreign Service officers. He came to Libya on a visit. He came and saw and left and I don't know whether there was any result in the Department or not. His interest was on higher policy, dealing with the Soviet Union and so forth.

Q: At the conclusion of your assignment to Libya you went to New York to the United Nations in 1954, what was your assignment there?

VILLARD: At the United Nations I was a member of the United States delegation to the General Assembly, which was very instructive in multilateral diplomacy and a day to day experience of very considerable interest. Henry Cabot Lodge was our chief delegate at that time. He was not a person to suffer the Third World countries gladly, you might say. He was interested in higher policy agendas such as the Cold War. I remember in one instance he dismissed the Ethiopian ambassador with a rather curt statement that his time was too limited to give him a long interview.

Q: Following the General Assembly you returned to Washington and your next major assignment was as deputy commandant of the National War College.

VILLARD: That is right. This entailed going down to the National War College to be in the assembly hall at a rather early hour for a general meeting of all the students. There was a deputy for foreign affairs, deputy for the Army, a deputy for the Navy and a deputy for the Air Force. We took turns in addressing the assembly and introducing the speaker of the day. Every day there was a lecturer of one kind or another, generally from a very high level, a high quality speaker. After one year I was asked to move down to Fort Lesley J. McNair where the National War College was located and live in the quarters assigned to

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me. The commandant at that time was Admiral Wooldridge of the Navy. For two years I occupied that slot, which was an interesting slot, indeed, chiefly involving a study of communism and Soviet Russia, our adversary in the Cold War.

Q: Did you teach classes?

VILLARD: I was in charge of sections. The routine of the college would be this basic, main lecture every morning. Then the group split up into sections. We would take turns handling different sections. The sections were mixed of different services, Army, Navy, Air Force, CIA, Treasury, State Department and so forth. That would continue with question and answer periods until lunch time. Then lunch would be held with the speaker of the day and an informal session with him afterwards.

Q: What was your impression of the quality of the military training of the officers with whom you came into contact?

VILLARD: I would have a very high opinion of the students, they were all top level quality from the various departments.

Q: Do you feel they had a very good grasp of foreign affairs as compared to Foreign Service officers who were assigned there?

VILLARD: I think that they at first did not have any particular grasp, but after a year's study their eyes were opened to the many political angles to world problems.

Q: What is your opinion of the value of National War College training to Foreign Service officers?

VILLARD: I think it is very valuable to Foreign Service officers, who often have no idea of how things work in the Navy, Air Force or the Army; they would come out of the year with broadened knowledge as a result of this cross-fertilization.

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Q: Let us move on now to 1957 when you were assigned as special assistant to the Under Secretary of State, Christian Herter.

VILLARD: At this period Christian Herter asked me to devote one whole year to the study of the Palestine problem. He suggested that I give up any other duties in the Department and establish my own office to study the implications of this increasingly difficult controversy. The Republican Party was anxious for a major political success and a solution to the Palestine problem would be a feather in the party's cap. I therefor had carte blanche to do whatever I liked to come up with some recommendation as to what should be the policy of the United States with regard to Palestine. Christian Herter was an extremely tolerant person; he was very well liked. He was not exactly a forceful character, but an able person, very concerned with problems of foreign affairs. He had a deep interest in international relations, a person one could easily well work with.

Q: Did you come up with any conclusions at the end of the study you performed?

VILLARD: Yes I did, I submitted my conclusions to Mr. Herter. In essence they devolved on two things. I felt that if the Arabs who had been dispossessed on the creation of the state of Israel and were scattered all over, and in refugee camps, could be allowed the right to return to their ancestral homes and if they could be compensated for their losses when the state of Israel was created, then that might be an approach to a solution. The rest of the conclusion was that Israel would permit neither of these two events to happen. The Israelis were adamant on both counts and we came up against a stone wall. The report that I filed has gathered dust from the day it was sent in.

Q: So in 1958 you were sent abroad again, this time to Geneva, Switzerland. What was your assignment there?

VILLARD: The title of my position in Geneva was United States Representative at the European Office of the United Nations and other International Organizations. This, as the

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title implies, involved chiefly representing of the United States vis a vis the other countries represented at the UN in Geneva. For the other organizations in Geneva, such as the World Health Organization, I had direct relations with them; they included the Office of Refugees, the International Labor Organization, etc. It is an example of multi-national diplomacy at its best.

Q: It was also the site of innumerable conferences dealing with trade and tariffs, communications.

VILLARD: Also, for example, the high-level political conference on surprise attack, the peaceful uses of atomic energy, and so forth.

Q: How do you feel the effectiveness was of your organization and staff in Geneva?

VILLARD: I think that we had an excellent organization, mostly specialists in various subjects, all of whom knew their business. We were unfortunately not able to represent the United States as effectively as we might in a social sense because of the action of the chairman of the House of Representative's appropriations committee, Congressman Rooney. He held the purse strings and for personal reasons he resented the fact that the incumbent consul general lost his job when I arrived at the post. He took out his ire at this by depriving me of all representation and housing allowances and we had to move out of a very satisfactory villa where we used to entertain our various diplomatic opposite numbers and move into a small apartment, which created a bad impression in Geneva. It was very embarrassing.

Q: How do you feel the interest was of the Department in your work at that time?

VILLARD: I think only a certain section of the Department was really interested. The trade agreements section of the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trades) in the Economic area of the Department was certainly interested, but not so much interest on the political side was apparent.

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Q: In 1960 you were then appointed ambassador to Senegal and to Mauritania. If I am not mistaken you were originally appointed ambassador to the Mali Federation which included the country of Mali as well. What happened?

VILLARD: What happened was that the Mali Federation, composed of Senegal and Mali, which were components of what used to be French West Africa, the large bulge on the map of Africa, couldn't make a go of it. Tribal animosities were so great that they split up. By the time I had been at my post a few days, literally, there was no longer any possibility of being accredited to a federation. I could either stay in Dakar, which was the capital of Senegal or go to Bamako, which was the capital of Mali.

Q: There wasn't much choice was there? [laughter]

VILLARD: That's right, I stayed in Senegal. I tried to be accredited, as my British colleague did also try, to be accredited to both and to make visits to Mali, basing in Senegal, but the Mali government would have none of that. They would have nobody connected to Senegal make a trip to their territory. So I remained in Senegal.

Q: How did the appointment itself come about?

VILLARD: The appointment came about through Loy Henderson, who at that time was Under Secretary for Administration. He called me up one day in Geneva and pointed out the fact that I had consistently declined several appointments as ambassador and it was high time I accepted an appointment as such. He said, "I think that it would be well for you to take the appointment to the Mali Federation. It is the best post among the new African countries in which the Department is setting up embassies." These were the former French African colonies which had been made independent by General de Gaulle. Henderson was engaged personally on a trip through Africa setting up the sites for new embassies everywhere. So I accepted this new post.

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Q: This was in fact the second new nation that you were envoy to.

VILLARD: Yes indeed.

Q: What was the situation as far as our interests in Africa and specifically in Senegal and Mauritania at that time?

VILLARD: There were very few American interests as such except that Dakar had been, during the war, one of our listening posts and its strategic value was very great. Trade between the United States and Senegal was minimal, but the relations were chiefly, in my case, on a personal level with the president, Leopold Senghor. He was a celebrated African poet in his own right. Educated in France, a teacher of French—he spoke better French than the French—under whom it was an inspiration to carry on. Our discussions were mainly of a general character. It was mostly connected with the status of the Negro in America and our domestic policies.

Q: How was your staff?

VILLARD: The staff at Dakar was consistently a good staff. Previous to it becoming an embassy it was a consulate general and as a fairly large office it had a thoroughly qualified staff.

Q: So upgrading to an embassy was not as difficult as setting up a brand-new embassy where there had been no representation at all?

VILLARD: The transition was easy, on the other hand, being also accredited to Mauritania, I made a trip to Nouakchott, the capital, also recently independent, and it was very primitive indeed. There was no embassy of any kind. I was taken out to a tract of land on the edge of the capital and shown the site of the future American embassy. The horizon was limitless.

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Q: Did you supervise the building of an embassy and assign people there?

VILLARD: No, this was to come later. Relations were established with the Prime Minister and head of government at that time, a very able, French-trained, official with a French wife to whom I presented my credentials. It was too early to construct an embassy and establish a staff in place. Our relations were conducted at long distance from Dakar.

Q: After a period of a year or so you returned to Washington on the election of John Kennedy?

VILLARD: The Kennedy administration was of the opinion that ambassadors should certainly be no older than 60, preferably in their 40s, with the result that my letter of resignation, which is automatic when a new president comes in, was accepted in what read like a routine form letter, ending with the words "your reassignment is not contemplated." The Senegalese government heard that I would not be with them much longer over the radio in a report from Washington. It stated that an announcement by the White House told of my recall and the appointment of a new man, a political appointee. When I got back to Washington I asked whether experience over many years did not equate with youth? The answer was, "that is a point of view, but it is not the prevailing point of view."

Q: In retrospect, would you say that this was your greatest disappointment in your career?

VILLARD: Yes, because I was a career minister, and I still had about three and a half years left before I would be automatically retired at age 65. I was in good health and I saw no reason why I should not have continued.

Q: Looking at the other side of things, what would you say gave you the greatest satisfaction during your entire career?

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VILLARD: I will quote a statement I made on the occasion of my fiftieth reunion at college which was an answer to a question put to me in a questionnaire for my class report. I said this, "I have found my deepest satisfaction in representing the United States in the conduct of its foreign business, in seeking possible remedies for international headaches, in that indefinable and unfathomable hold which public service exerts on some individuals. To quote President Johnson, 'the assistance given to a young and struggling nation, the rift repaired here, the smoldering fire damped down there, all contribute importantly to world peace.' To be a small cog in the machinery to preserve the peace in this dangerous age has its own reward."

Q: What do you feel are the greatest strengths and greatest weaknesses of the Foreign Service?

VILLARD: I think the greatest strengths of the Foreign Service are in the character and qualities of the officers, men and women, who represent the United States of America abroad. The maintenance of this high quality is essential. The weaknesses of the Service are chiefly in the appointment of political appointees who know nothing whatever about diplomacy and who have to rely on the professional advice they receive from their own staff.

Q: Would you say that the make-up of the Foreign Service as it is today is an evolution you look upon favorably compared to the Service when you first entered it in the 1920s?

VILLARD: It is hard to measure this because the Service when I entered it was so small. It was a small, and by definition, an elite group who were chosen very carefully by stiff examinations lasting over three days. It was avowedly elite, and it represented the very best that could be obtained in the nation. Today the Service has been tremendously expanded; it is no longer based on the same principle, it is based more on being representative End of tape

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End of interview